



40

ANNUAL REPORT

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS  
OF HELPING GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS

# 40 Year Milestones

# 40 Year Milestones

A group of concerned community members meet around a kitchen table to discuss the formation of an organisation aimed at assisting Self Help groups in Western Australia.

1982

1983

The Western Institute of Self Help (W.I.S.H) is established with the assistance of a small grant from the then Department for Communities.

W.I.S.H publishes the first edition of its Self Help directory.

1984

1986

W.I.S.H hosts a Self Help Festival to highlight and create an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of Self Help.

W.I.S.H publishes "A Journey Through Self Help," an evaluation of Self Help in Western Australia.

1987

1994

W.I.S.H launches an audio tape on "How to Start a Support Group".

W.I.S.H is granted a Charitable Collections License.

1997

W.I.S.H facilitates a Bereavement Information Forum.

1998

W.I.S.H launches "People Need People," a Self Help video.

W.I.S.H goes online and launches its website.

1999

2003

In celebration of its 20th anniversary, W.I.S.H hosts a Self Help Matters Forum for self help and support groups and community-based organisations.

W.I.S.H rebrands to ConnectGroups to more aptly describe the services the organisation offers.

2007

2010

ConnectGroups celebrates its first National Awareness Day, an inaugural awareness day for Australian Self Help and Support Groups.

# 40 YEARS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

ConnectGroups acknowledges the traditional carers of country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures; and to Elders past and present. ConnectGroups further acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation as the traditional carers of the land on which our office sits.

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## PATRON REPORT

It is with great pleasure that I extend a warm welcome to you to the annual report of ConnectGroups for the year 2022/2023. Your unwavering support and commitment to peer support in WA has been instrumental in our journey towards achieving our mission. ConnectGroups promotes the philosophy and practice of peer support throughout Western Australia. Fostering empowerment among Peer Support Groups allows people dealing with stressful life problems and situations to share their experiences and to offer emotional and practical support to one another.

As we reflect upon the past year's accomplishments and challenges, it is an honour to share with you the impact of your contributions as

members, funders, stakeholders, the team, our volunteers and, of course, our Board of Management. All of you have collectively enabled us to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve, our Peer Support Groups.

In this report, you will find a comprehensive overview of our achievements, initiatives, and financial performance. We are proud to showcase the milestones we have reached and the projects that have come to fruition with your dedication and support. Your belief in our vision has allowed us to innovate, adapt, and thrive even in the face of adversity. Each page of this report tells a story of dedication, resilience, and the transformative power of collective effort. It is a testament to the belief that positive change is possible when a community comes together with a common purpose.

Key achievements this year included the delivery of the first Support Groups Awareness Week campaign, which invited all Peer Support Groups,

partners, and supporters to get involved in celebrating and promoting peer support to the wider community. The launch of the Rare, Genetic, and Undiagnosed (RGU) Conditions Sector Development Program and the Rare Disease Day Exhibit showcased and supported a unique sector of WA groups and organisations assisting those living with RGU conditions. The Alternatives to Suicide Forum brought together key Support Groups, organisations, and champions working in the space of mental health and suicide prevention, and also saw the launch of Alt2Su research which demonstrates the effectiveness of peer support approaches for suicide survivors or those experiencing suicidal distress.

As we embark on a new year, we do so with a deep sense of gratitude for your continued friendship and partnership. Your support fuels our determination to do even more, reach even higher, and touch the lives of many more individuals in need of support. This annual report is not just a reflection of the past but a promise



for the future.

We look forward to your valuable feedback and insights as we move forward, and we remain committed to the transparency and accountability that you, our members, deserve. Thank you for being an integral part of our journey, and we eagerly anticipate the positive impact we will create together in the year ahead.

*Lyn Beazley*

Prof. Lyn Beazley AO  
Patron





## CHAIR REPORT

As the Chair of the Board at ConnectGroups, it is both a pleasure and a privilege to extend a warm welcome to you as we present our annual report for 2022/2023. This report represents a pivotal moment in our organisation's journey, a time for reflection, and an opportunity to share our collective achievements, ambitions, and the positive impact we have had on individuals and communities through the power of peer support.

The past year has been an inspiring chapter in the ConnectGroups

story. It has demonstrated the incredible resilience and unity of our network, emphasising the significance of peer support in the face of life's challenges. Our role as the governance body of ConnectGroups has been to provide strategic guidance, advocate for the vital importance of peer support, and ensure the responsible stewardship of resources. As you explore this annual report, you'll find that our commitment to these principles has not wavered. We are driven by the belief that every individual, regardless of their

circumstances, should have access to the support and connection that peer Support Groups offer. In the pages that follow, you will gain insight into the diverse activities and initiatives that have been undertaken with humility and dedication. We have strived to uphold our mission while continuously adapting to the evolving needs of our community. Your support, as members and stakeholders, plays a pivotal role in our ability to achieve this mission.

ConnectGroups has always stood as a beacon of hope, fostering connections and support among diverse individuals and groups who are navigating life's challenges. In the following pages, you will gain insight into the vital role ConnectGroups plays in our community, both in terms of statistics and the countless personal stories of resilience and transformation.

The report showcases the milestones we've reached, the



initiatives we've undertaken, and the resources we've provided to empower individuals and communities. It underscores the value of peer support in enhancing emotional well-being and community cohesion, and it highlights our dedication to ensuring that we support the formation, blossoming and growth of Support Groups old and new.

**Brian O'Keefe**  
Chair



## CEO REPORT

As the Chief Executive Officer of ConnectGroups, Western Australia's Peak Body for peer support, it is with great pride and a sense of responsibility that I present this report, reflecting our collective achievements, progress, and commitment to the vital mission we serve. I am honoured to contribute to ConnectGroups' annual report for 2022/2023.

This past year has been a testament to the resilience and dedication of our organisation and the peer support community we represent. In the face of unprecedented challenges, we have continued to thrive and expand our reach. Our core mission, to empower individuals

through peer support, has never been more critical, as the need for connection and understanding has surely been heightened by the global events that unfolded.

ConnectGroups serves as the cornerstone of peer support in our community, providing a platform for individuals and groups to connect, share, and support one another through life's diverse challenges. Our work extends far beyond mere statistics; it is deeply rooted in the stories, resilience, and transformation of countless lives. This annual report offers a glimpse into the heart of our operations, showcasing the dedication and passion of our team, the support of our partners, and, most importantly, the resilience and hope of our members.

In this annual report, you will find a comprehensive account of our accomplishments, initiatives, and the impact of our work across Western Australia. We will share stories of individuals who

have found comfort, strength, and transformation through the power of peer support. Moreover, this report will highlight our collaborative efforts, partnerships, and strategic directions that have been instrumental in driving our cause forward. Our commitment to transparency and accountability is unwavering, and we aim to provide you with a thorough understanding of our activities, financial stewardship, and future plans.

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated team, our volunteers, our valued members, our Board of Management and our steadfast supporters. Your contributions, be it through your time, expertise, or resources, have been fundamental to our accomplishments. I invite you to explore this annual report, learn about our journey, and reflect upon the profound impact of peer support. Together, we can continue to create meaningful change and provide the vital support that individuals and communities need.



Thank you for your ongoing trust and support. With your continued partnership, we look forward to another year of positive growth and transformation.

**Dr Vicky Vass**  
CEO





## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

### AUGUST

- The small grants team deliver a Regional Strategy presentation to the Mental Health Commission's Community Support Services and Strategic Commissioning teams.

### SEPTEMBER

- In recognition of [Women's Health Week](#), ConnectGroups partners with Collier Park Golf Course and Gynaecological Awareness Information Network Inc. to deliver a community yoga and women's health information session.



- ConnectGroups travels to the South West to strengthen relationships, learn about issues faced in the region, and to build capability of Support Groups based in Margaret River, Busselton, Bunbury, and Bridgetown.
- ConnectGroups is successful in receiving a Lotterywest grant to deliver an Expo during Support Groups Awareness Week.

### OCTOBER

- Ms Kim Giddens MLA, Member for Bateman, visits the ConnectGroups office to present the [Lotterywest Cheque](#) towards a Support Groups Awareness Expo, providing an opportunity for ConnectGroups to share the work and impact of the Peer Support Group Sector.



- ConnectGroups delivers its first Support Groups Awareness Week, with the theme "The Power of Shared Experience", showcasing the foundation of all Support Groups - a shared health or mental health condition, a shared concern, or a shared life adversity. The week featured a social media campaign, radio interviews with local Support Groups, and an [Awareness Expo](#) at the Perth Cultural Centre.

### NOVEMBER

- The tenth cycle of workforce development participants complete their Certificate IV in Community Services, enabling Support Group leaders and facilitators to achieve a nationally recognised qualification that will ensure strong governance and support the sustainability of their groups.

### DECEMBER

- The Rare, Genetic, and Undiagnosed (RGU) Conditions Sector Development Program officially launched at ConnectGroups' [Annual General Meeting and Christmas Morning Tea](#). The program, funded by the Department of Health, aims to build the capacity and capability of Support Groups and organisations working in the RGU Sector.
- ConnectGroups publishes a literature review on the Health and Wellbeing of Peer Support Groups.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR



### FEBRUARY

- Aligned with Rare Disease Day, ConnectGroups hosts a Rare Disease Exhibit showcasing the photos and stories of people living with rare, genetic, and undiagnosed conditions.

### MARCH

- ConnectGroups releases the 7th edition of its Pay it Forward stories book, showcasing the projects and outcomes of small grant recipients and the impact on their groups and the wider community.

### APRIL

- ConnectGroups is successful in receiving a Canning Bridge Place Grant through the City of Melville to deliver an Expo during Support Groups Awareness Week.
- ConnectGroups partners with UWA and South Metropolitan Health Service on a project that focuses on AI-powered clinical documentation for accurate and responsive education and support to patients.

### MAY

- ConnectGroups, the City of Mandurah, and Invisible Illnesses Inc. launch the Mandurah Peer Support Network, which facilitates quarterly meetings for Mandurah-based peer Support Groups, organisations, and champions to network, share information, and build capability.

- ConnectGroups launches the trial of a Social Media Volunteer Program to assist peer Support Groups with marketing and promotion efforts.
- ConnectGroups travels to the South West during National Volunteer Week to provide training and networking opportunities to peer Support Groups based in Margaret River and Busselton, and to meet with group leaders in surrounding South West suburbs.
- During Reconciliation Week, ConnectGroups participates in a Reconciliation Breakfast to improve staff knowledge, cultural awareness, and to show support for reconciliation efforts.
- ConnectGroups hosts an [Alternatives to Suicide Forum](#) and launches the Alt2Su groundbreaking research highlighting a peer supported approach to distress and mental health.

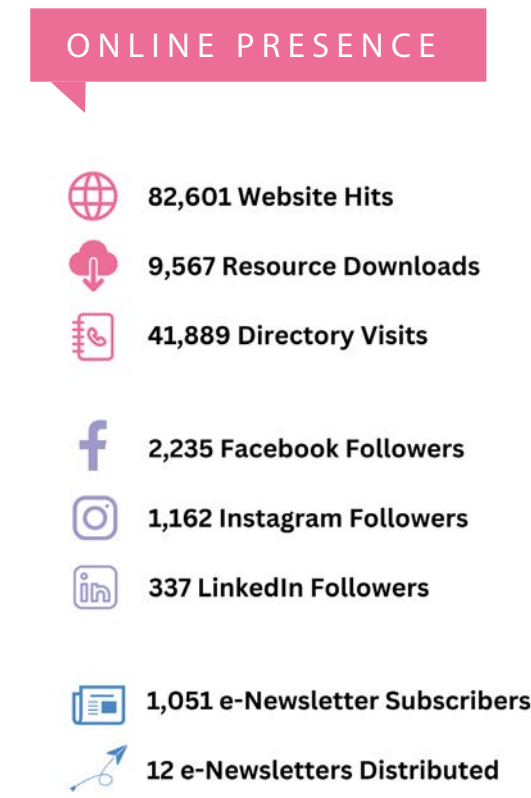
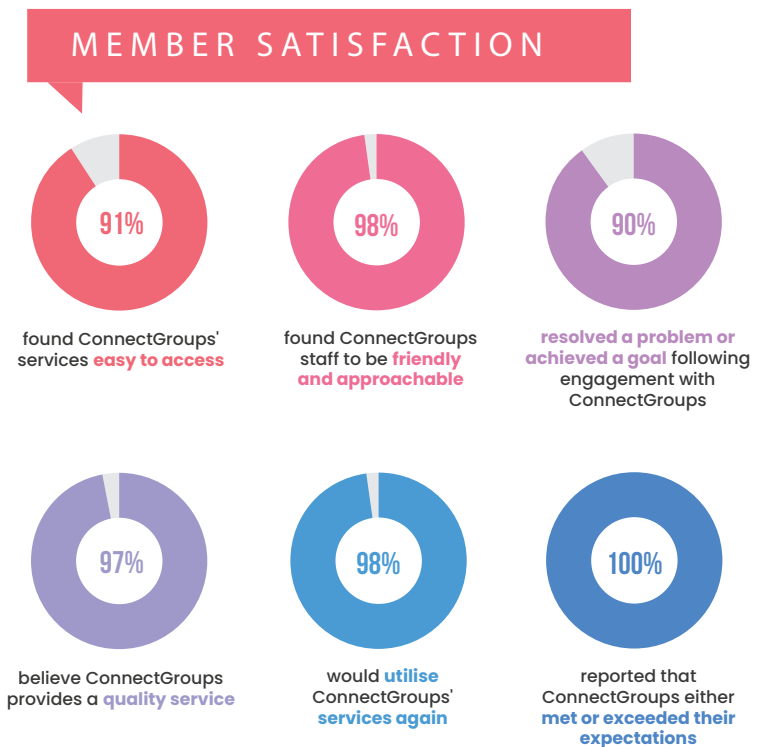
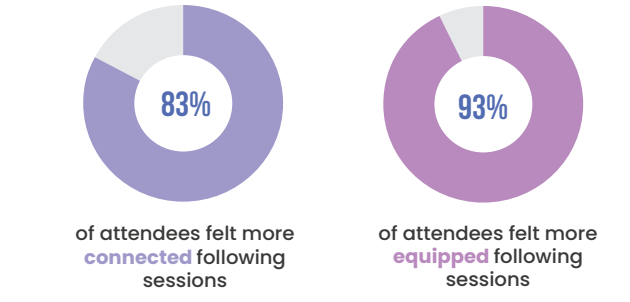
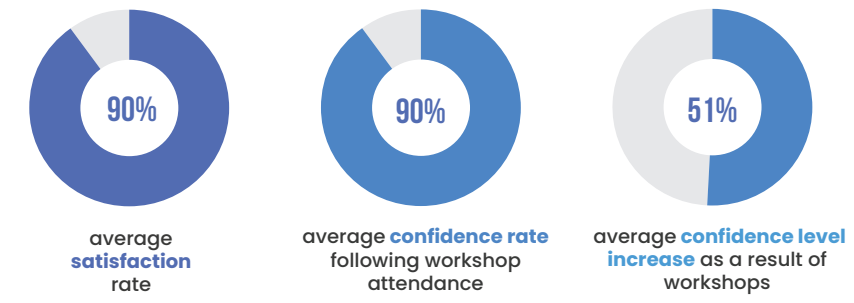
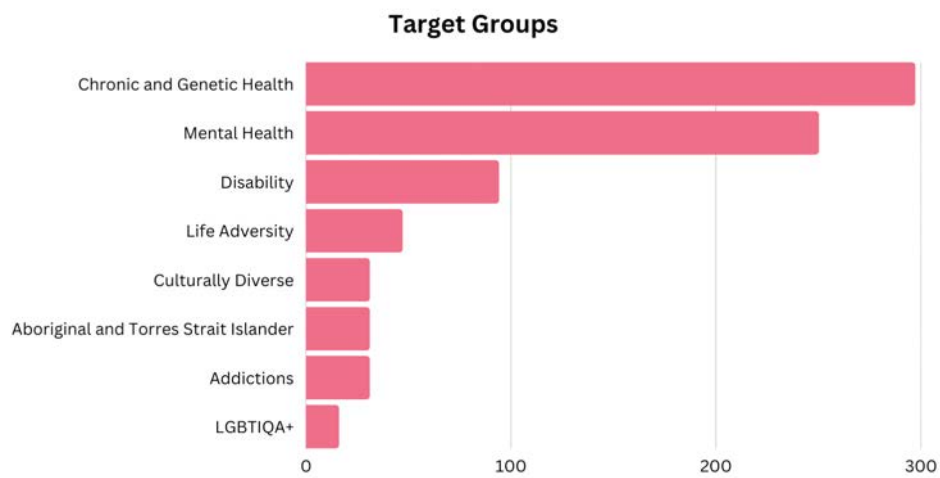
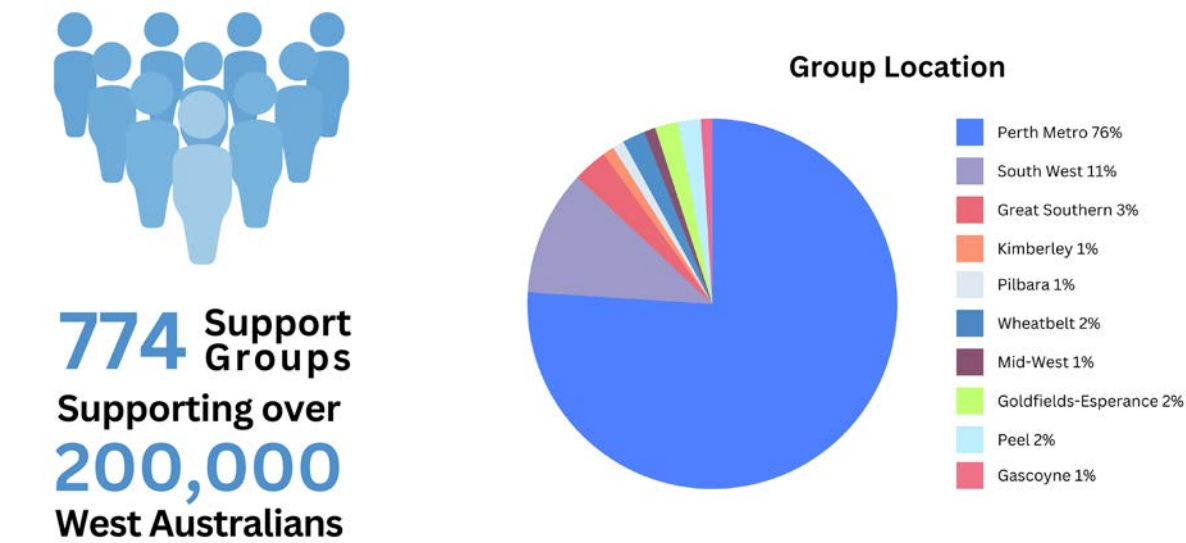


### JUNE

- ConnectGroups [travels to Broome](#) and Bidadanga in the Kimberley to re-build relationships, engage with Dream it Forward grant recipients, promote programs and services, and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- In recognition of [Men's Health Week](#), ConnectGroups hosts two Blokes & Bridges Walks - North and South - to promote health and mental health, and provide a platform for community members to start a conversation around men's health and wellbeing.









TREASURER REPORT

I am delighted to present the financial overview of ConnectGroups in the annual report for the year 2022/2023. As the Treasurer of our organisation, it is my privilege to provide you with a transparent and comprehensive account of our financial stewardship. This report not only highlights our commitment to fiscal responsibility but also showcases how prudent financial management supports our mission of promoting peer support and community well-being.

In these pages, you will find a breakdown of our financial performance, including income, expenditures, and the allocation of funds to various programs and

initiatives. Our commitment to financial transparency ensures that all funds are being used effectively to advance our mission. Despite the financial challenges that organisations face, ConnectGroups has maintained a strong financial position through diligent budgeting and stewardship. We take pride in our ability to maximise the impact of every dollar, and this report reflects our dedication to fiscal prudence.

ConnectGroups would not be able to achieve its mission without the support of our funders, partners, and members, and we are deeply appreciative of your trust and commitment. As we move forward into the next year, we will continue to uphold the highest standards of financial accountability while pursuing our goal of fostering connections and support in our community. Your continued support is integral to our success, and we look forward to your partnership in the bright future ahead.

*JRM de Mel*

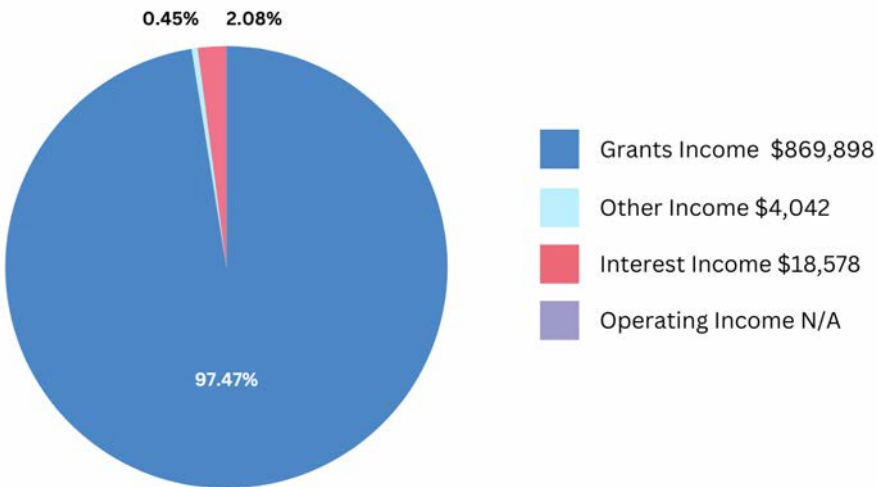
Milindha de Mel  
Treasurer



FINANCIAL CHARTS

The financial position of ConnectGroups remains stable with net assets of \$468,128, a decrease of \$80,909, due to extraordinary expenditure, on the previous financial year. At balance date, 97% of total assets were held in cash or receivables, with current assets coverage of current liabilities at 2.03.

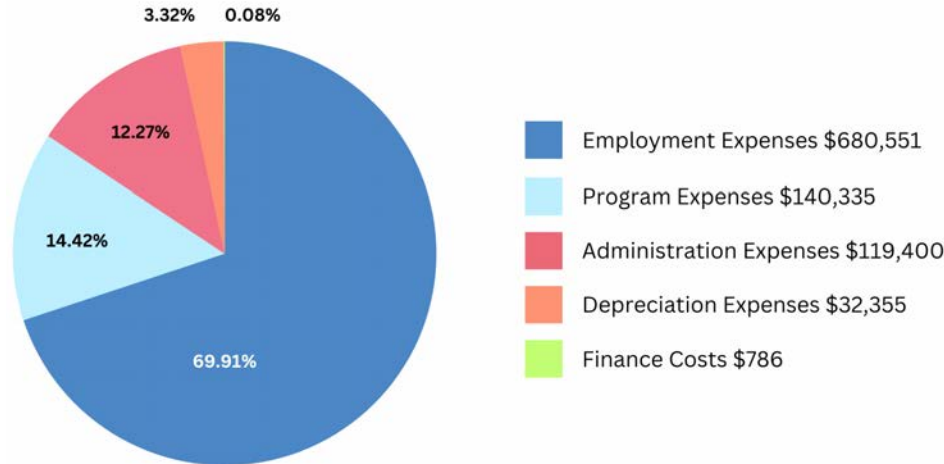
Operational Income



Total operational income for the financial year was \$892,518. Grants income (97%) remains the primary source of revenue followed by Other Income (3%).

FINANCIAL CHARTS

Operational Expenditure



Total expenditure for the financial year was \$973,427. Employment expenses (70%) remained the largest expenditure type, together with Program expenses (14%) and Administration expenses (12%).

Non Operating Expenses



Non operating activities are represented in our Brokering Programs Pay it Forward (PIF) and Dream it Forward (DIF).

BOARD AND STAFF



**Brian O’Keefe**  
Chair



**Jonine Collins**  
Deputy Chair



**Eimear Quigley**  
Secretary



**Milindha de Mel**  
Treasurer



**Conrad Pires**  
Board Member



**Dr David Cox**  
Board Member



**Dr Kaine Grigg**  
Board Member



**Peta Van Heurck**  
Board Member



**Dr Vicky Vass**  
CEO



**Amanda Muir**  
Advocacy and Communications Coordinator



**Gemma Hughes**  
Office Manager



**Christine Hendricks**  
Program Manager



**Karen Silverthorne**  
Community Engagement Officer



**Abbey Grosse**  
Sector and Community Development Officer



**Emily Mostyn-Brown**  
Training and Development Coordinator



**Carolina Hernandez**  
Volunteer and ATS Officer

VOLUNTEERS

- Christine Baldwin
  - Julie Ann Clift
  - Rodney Cumberbatch
  - Sabeen Fahad
  - Stephanie Nagel
- Chau Quach
  - Jacob Smith
  - Thi Hai Yen ‘Yenessa’ Tran
  - Isabella Villani
  - Margaret Wilson

FORMER BOARD AND STAFF

- Peta Wootton
  - Melissa Grove
  - Kiera Collier
  - Faye Baxter
- Affi Malek
  - Antonella Segre
  - Nadia Suwignjo

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ConnectGroups Board and staff thank and acknowledge the Department of Communities, its Minister the Hon. Sabine Winton MLA; Minister for Health, Mental Health the Hon. Amber-Jade Sanderson BA MLA. The Director General of the Department of Communities Mike Rowe and Grant Manager Theresa Foote. The Mental Health Commissioner Maureen Lewis, former Commissioner Jen McGrath, and Contract Manager Elena Cope. Lotterywest’s Grants and Development Manager Elaine Walsh.

ConnectGroups extends its thanks and gratitude to all of the organisations whose support has been key to its growth and development.

Department of Health

- Belinda Burns
- Jessica Cheng
- Kristen Nowak

UWA McCusker Centre for Citizenship

- Michelle Scott
- Barbara Goodwin

WACOSS

- Louise Giolitto
- Rachel Siewert
- Richard Hayes

Health Consumers’ Council WA

- Clare Mullen

Linkwest

- Jane Harwood

HelpingMinds

- Debbie Childs

People with Disabilities WA

- Andrea Surman
- Grace Rosales

Support Groups Queensland

- Selina Utting

City of Melville

- Gail Bowman
- Stuart Tomlinson
- Christine Young
- Kayleigh Ellis
- Deena Lazzari

Volunteer Melville

- Sarah Stephenson
- Philippa Aitken

Shire of Augusta Margaret River

- Jason Cleary
- Rebecca Young
- Shannon Walker

City of Busselton

- Jessica Watts
- Cassandra Armstrong

Busselton Volunteer Centre

- Carl Holroyd

City of Mandurah

- Fiona Allen

City of Karratha

- Jo Gibellini
- Christy Reed

ConnectGroups Network Sector Advocacy

- Ken Bezant
- Jo Brown
- Sandra Button
- Ron Deng
- Jo Drayton
- Melissa Dumitru
- Michelle Greenwood
- Paul Rogers
- Stuart Roberts

ConnectGroups Rare, Genetic, and Undiagnosed Conditions Sector Consumer Advisory Group

- Amber Gilkes
- Lisa Taylor
- Julia McDonald
- Ross Campbell
- Michelle Greenwood
- Melissa Dumitru
- Helen Wilson
- Erinna Ford

Fiona Stanley Hospital

- Tim Leen
- Mel Wright

WA Recovery College Alliance

- Naomi Carter

Partners and Friends

- Dianne Bianchini
- Joe Calleja
- Sera Davidow
- Kim Giddens MLA
- David Hodgson
- Lyn Millet
- Lyn Mahboub
- Lisa Munday MLA
- Stephen Pratt MLA
- Act Belong Commit
- Perth Inner City Youth Services
- Sharon Wood-Kenney
- Shelter WA
- Social Reinvestment WA
- Suicide Prevention Australia
- Volunteering WA
- WAAMH



THE WAY FORWARD

After extensive analysis, market research, and thoughtful consideration, ConnectGroups has charted a course to capitalise on emerging opportunities and address future challenges. The organisation's new strategy centres around innovation, member-centricity, and sustainable growth. ConnectGroups will leverage cutting-edge technologies, invest in the development of its members and stakeholders, while fostering a culture of collaboration to drive impactful solutions that meet members' and stakeholders' evolving needs. Embracing a holistic approach, ConnectGroups aims to strengthen its membership presence, expand into new areas, and solidify its position as the Peak Body for Peer support in WA.

With the new strategic purpose, mission, and value proposition, ConnectGroups is confident that it can create lasting value for members and stakeholders and drive the organisation towards a successful and thriving future.



THE WAY FORWARD



STRATEGIC DIRECTION  
2023 - 2025

Our Purpose		Our Vision		Our value proposition	
Representing, empowering and developing the peer support sector		Healthy and connected communities		We provide guidance, expertise and skills for peer support groups, organisations and networks	
Our Focus Areas	Advocacy and representation	Leadership and trust	Currency and accessibility	Collaboration and partnerships	Sustainability
Our Goals	To be the known advocate for the peer support sector across metro and regional WA	Increase brand visibility and engagement, increasing our potential impact	Continuously review and innovate to ensure our services are fit for purpose, meeting current and future member needs	Foster collaboration and build meaningful partnerships across government, NGO and private sector	Ensure financial sustainability through sound operating model and diversified revenue streams

# 40 Year Milestones

# 40 Year Milestones

ConnectGroups launches Towards Good Practice, a minimum standards guide for Support Groups.

ConnectGroups launches the Pay it Forward small grants program, assisting groups to provide a positive mental health impact to their members and the community.

2011

ConnectGroups becomes a Department of Local Government and Communities Preferred Service Provider.

ConnectGroups implements Results-Based Accountability to better measure the impact and effectiveness of its services.

2013

ConnectGroups launches the Live it Forward together small grants program, providing funding to Support Groups and organisations for projects demonstrating sustainable chronic conditions self-management outcomes.

2015

ConnectGroups partners with the City of Melville to establish the Hand to Heart Social Connections Program, aimed at improving quality of life for older people.

ConnectGroups launches LGBTI+ Peer Support: A Step by Step Guide.

2018

ConnectGroups' service agreement with the Department of Communities transitions from the Community and Neighbourhood Development Program to the Sector Support, Development and Advocacy Program; and the organisation moves to a stronger focus on capability building, awareness, and advocacy.

In the wake of COVID-19, ConnectGroups delivers the Stay Connected with Telehealth project. It also introduces Zoom workshops.

ConnectGroups launches the resource - Hand to Heart: A Seniors Social Connection Program for your LGA.

2020

ConnectGroups delivers its first Support Groups Awareness Week campaign, inviting the peer Support Group Sector, NGOs, Government representatives, and the wider community to celebrate and raise awareness about the existence and value of peer support.

ConnectGroups launches the Strengthening the Capacity and Capability of the Rare, Genetic, and Undiagnosed Conditions Sector in WA program, assisting RGU Support Groups and organisations through capacity and capability building, awareness, and advocacy.

2022

2012

ConnectGroups launches the Self Help and Support Group Care Package, providing scholarships for Support Group facilitators to undertake formal qualifications that assist with group delivery and contribute to workforce development.

2014

ConnectGroups partners with the North Metropolitan Health Service to develop a Chronic Conditions Self-Management directory.

ConnectGroups launches the Dream it Forward small grants program, supporting projects focused on improving the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

2017

ConnectGroups launches Effectively Engaging with Men, a co-designed resource assisting Support Groups and services to better engage with men.

2019

ConnectGroups launches the Community Link Booth at Fiona Stanley Hospital, providing referral pathways for patients, family and carers.

ConnectGroups launches the Give it Forward small grants program, assisting non-mental health groups to build their capacity and sustainability.

ConnectGroups expands the Certificate IV program to offer Certificate IV in Mental Health.

ConnectGroups launches its Podcast Series.

2021

ConnectGroups launches the Alternatives to Suicide WA Alliance, introducing an innovative peer-led suicide prevention program to WA.

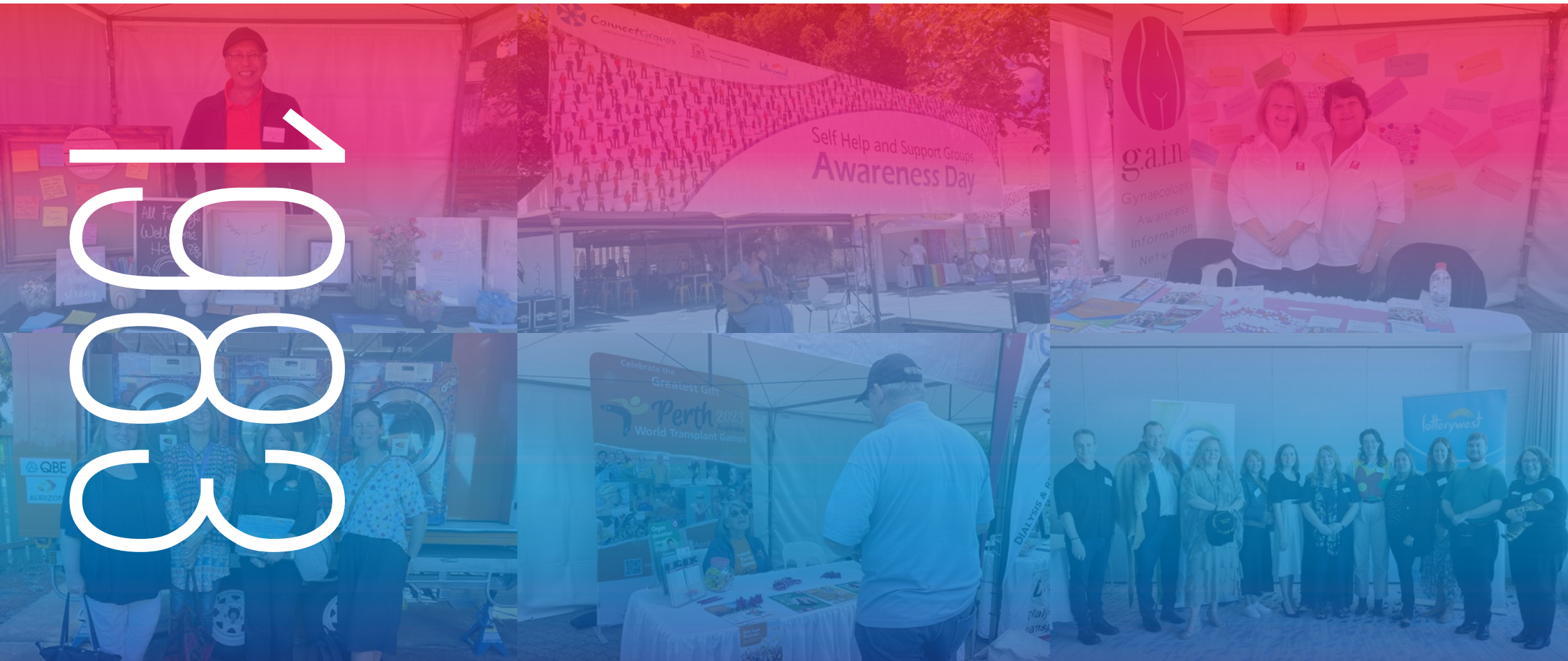
ConnectGroups presents its first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to demonstrate its pledge and commitment to First Nations Australians.

2023

ConnectGroups delivers an Alternatives to Suicide Forum and launches groundbreaking Alt2Su research which highlights a peer supported approach to distress and mental health.

ConnectGroups facilitates a Rare Disease Day Exhibition, showcasing the photos and stories of people living with rare, genetic, and undiagnosed conditions, and raising awareness about the RGU Sector.





**ConnectGroups**  
helping support groups & individuals